



# Georgia DOT Takes On New Role To Deliver Projects Faster

When trying to finish a job faster, adding more tasks to it wouldn't seem the best approach?

Yet, that's exactly what the Georgia Department of Transportation is doing; and early results are promising.

Each year, the Department begins hundreds of millions of dollars in new transportation projects to help keep Georgians moving and our state growing. Hastening the completion of these often multi-year projects is a priority. Building new roads or widening existing ones almost always begins with relocating existing utility lines. Until the pipes, conduit and wires for services such as gas, water, sewer, electric, phone and cable are identified and moved out of the construction area, little work can be started.

And that's where Georgia DOT found that project delays often began – at their beginning! Bids would be awarded to a contractor; affected utilities notified; work authorized; sites cleared of trees and vegetation; *and nothing happened; time passed...still, nothing happened.* One regrettable project actually took four entire months just to get utilities moved; then less than three months to build!

Every delay seemed to have its own special circumstance; every participant their own self-absolving rationalization. The end result though remained too common – a finger-pointing exchange among the Department, its contractors and the utilities while angry local officials and exasperated citizens looked on and pleaded/demanded that someone just do something. We decided that someone would be us. The fundamental problem was utilities were spending - not making - money in relocations and had no incentive to hurry; while contractors, meanwhile, couldn't start making money – and in fact were losing it – with men and machines idled waiting on the utilities.

Recognizing there had to be a better way; we asked the Georgia General Assembly to help. The result was a new provision that now allows Georgia DOT to include private utility relocations as part of a project contract. The Department or contractor can make relocations themselves if the utility has so agreed. If a utility chooses not to allow such relocation of its facilities and instead opts to continue handling them itself, there now are penalties for delays. Damage claims can be filed against utilities for lost time, equipment expenses and costs assessed for delaying the project's benefits to the public.

While the program is still relatively new, utility companies are warming to the concept. Agreements have been reached with major providers such as Georgia Power and Atlanta Gas Light with more in development.

Everyone stands to benefit from the program. Utilities are freed of the need to disrupt schedules and divert crews from paying jobs. Contractors can be more precise in their bidding because they have more confidence in project timelines. And though it may seem counterintuitive, the Department believes this approach should actually save taxpayer dollars too as the savings gained by meeting schedules will easily exceed the cost of the additional work.

The end result – the elimination of a big roadblock to delivering projects on time and on budget. And that's the biggest benefit of all – the one legislators, local officials, the public and the Georgia DOT are seeking.

Georgia DOT's program to reduce utility delays is a model for other transportation departments across the country and has drawn federal recognition. The people behind this program represent just one of many Department groups committed to providing a safe, seamless and sustainable transportation system that supports Georgia's economy and is sensitive to both its citizens and its environment.

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